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Book Review of Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today, by Hans K. LaRondelle

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LaRondelle, Hans K. *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today*. Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983. vii + 210 pp. \$12.50/\$8.50.

In *Deliverance in the Psalms*, Hans K. LaRondelle has accomplished what few in the spate of modern treatments of the Psalms have achieved: He has succeeded in penetrating into the inner essence of the Psalms in such a way as to lay bare the very heart-throb and animating spirit of their message. With rare artistry LaRondelle combines sound scholarship with profound spiritual and homiletical sensitivity to the Prayers and Praises of Israel.

The book is also effective and refreshing in its pedagogical approach. Four introductory chapters introduce the reader respectively to "The Religious Significance of the Psalms," "The Origin and Classification of the Psalms," "The Poetic Style and Its Meaning," and "Theological Structures of the Psalms." Then follow expositions of eighteen psalms (Pss 1, 2, 7, 11, 12, 15, 19, 22, 24, 27, 32, 46, 50, 65, 73, 103, 104, 110) which illustrate and elucidate the conclusions of the introductory chapters and which focus in particular upon the theme of deliverance—the "divine assurance of the ultimate triumph of justice on the earth and the establishment of the peaceful kingdom of God" (p. 2).

Only a few of the rich insights that emerge from this most provocative and practical guide to the Psalms can be highlighted here. In the chapter on the Psalms' religious significance, the author points out the unique role of the Psalms in Scripture as "the heartbeat of Israel's religion" (p. 3), in which "one can look into the hearts of the Hebrew saints" and also "into the heart of God" (p. 4). The Psalms, in their fivefold division regarded by Jews as "Israel's echo of faith to the five books of Moses" (p. 4), are shown to have as their purpose "teaching all men how to worship God in spirit and truth, how to pray effectual prayers, in what spirit to bring sacrifices in the Temple, how to interpret the natural world around us, and the meaning of Israel's laws and stirring history" (p. 5). LaRondelle especially points to the testimonies of praise as reflecting "the very essence of life to Israel" (p. 7) and to the "mysterious surplus value" (p. 9) finding fulfillment in the Messiah.

Chap. 2, along with providing a helpful survey of the origin and classification of the Psalms, contains what I consider the most profound and satisfying approach to the Imprecatory Psalms to be found anywhere in print. This analysis (pp. 19-23) alone is well worth the price of the book. The third chapter introduces the reader to the basic elements of Hebrew poetry, including clear examples and explanations of parallelism, chiasm, stanza division, and acrostic. Chap. 4 highlights major theological structures of the Psalms. Particularly rewarding here is the author's treatment of the Psalms' theocentric "groundplan of dividing all men into two

contrasting categories or classes: the righteous and the wicked" (p. 31). Building upon this understanding of the groundplan, LaRondelle further explores what he has treated previously in his published dissertation *Perfection and Perfectionism* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979), pp. 109-158—namely, that the way of Israel's redemptive experience centered in the sanctuary. (The menorah pictured on the book cover appears to symbolize this sanctuary-centered, salvific orientation.)

The exposition of individual psalms that comprises the bulk of the book gives evidence of how intimately and intensely the author himself has "lived" with these psalms. The reader is ushered in, as it were, to a palace of theological treasure with each psalm, and is served a sumptuous feast of spiritual delicacies. Each psalm is not only plumbed for exegetical/theological and spiritual/homiletical riches, but compared with, and illuminated by, companion psalms and other OT and NT passages, revealing the theocentric/Christocentric focus and organic unity of Scripture as a whole.

Worthy of special attention is the author's treatment of Pss 1 and 2, the "Doorkeepers" of the Psalms. LaRondelle shows how these two psalms expound respectively the two central pillars of Israel's existence, the Torah and the Messiah—or in Christian terms, the Law and the Gospel, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Furthermore, he clarifies how Ps 2 has a threefold Christological application in the NT, paralleling the three phases of Jesus' redemptive ministry (inauguration, rulership, final judgment).

Several striking points of emphasis in connection with other psalms may be briefly noted: The exposition of Ps 7 offers a key to the proper understanding of the so-called "Psalms of Innocence"; Ps 15 is shown to be grounded in a clear understanding of righteousness by faith and not legalistic works-righteousness, as has sometimes been suggested; Pss 11 and 50 are analyzed for their portrayal of a divine investigative judgment from the heavenly sanctuary; a balanced view of both justification and sanctification is seen to emerge from Ps 32; Ps 73 is tapped to reveal the way "from doubt to assurance" through the perspective of the sanctuary and its foreshadowing of the final judgment; Ps 103 is set forth in its revelation of "the attitude of gratitude"; and Ps 110 is analyzed as a direct Messianic prophecy, the two divine oracles which constitute (in Luther's words) "the very core and quintessence of the whole Scripture" (p. 205).

One could quibble about a few minor points in this book. There is the inconsistency of using footnotes in the introductory chapters and none in the expositions of individual psalms. In the introductory chapters it is sometimes unclear how far the author departs from modern critical scholars in the use of form criticism. Does he or does he not, for instance, accept the *Sitz im Leben* of a New Year's Festival or Annual Royal Festival (compare pp. 18-19 with p. 148)?

Moreover, what is the precise nature of the Messianic hope in the Psalms? Apart from Ps 110 (which is seen as the only direct Messianic prophecy in the Psalter), is it only a matter of "historical frustration" (p. 29) leading eventually to the longing for a future "ideal situation" (p. 39) with an ideal Messianic king, as the author suggests, or are there in the Psalms other explicit indications of direct Messianic predictions or typological foreshadowings outside of Ps 110, as many evangelical scholars maintain? As a related question, is the eschatological perspective of a psalm apparent only in the light of the NT "re-application" of an original local historical setting, or does an exegesis of the psalm indicate an inherent eschatological focus (as p. 138 seems to imply)? In other words, regarding both Messianism and eschatology, is it appropriate to equate *sensus plenior* with typology (as seems the case here; cf. pp. 310, 138, etc.), or does typology, in contradistinction to *sensus plenior*, call for explicit indications of its prospective-predictive character *before* the antitypical fulfillment occurs?

These few points aside, perhaps the greatest drawback to this book is that we do not yet have LaRondelle's insights on all 150 psalms! It is hoped that in a subsequent volume the author may stir our hearts and illumine our minds with a complete exegetical-homiletical commentary on the Psalter. In the meantime, I have chosen and recommend *Deliverance in the Psalms* as the primary introductory textbook for exegesis courses on the Psalms. Every thoughtful reader—scholar, pastor, layperson alike—will be intellectually stimulated and spiritually rejuvenated by these "Messages of Hope for Today."

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Sigrist, Marcel. *Neo-Sumerian Account Texts in the Horn Archaeological Museum*. Foreword by Lawrence T. Geraty. Institute of Archaeology Publications, Assyriological Series, vol. 4; Andrews University Cuneiform Texts, vol. 1. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1984. vii + 89 pp. + 108 plates. \$29.95.

The pace of Assyriological publication is all too often painstakingly slow. There are too few scholars, too many texts, and not enough funds to sustain prolonged study and expensive publication. The case of the 3200 tablets now in the Horn Archaeological Museum at Andrews University is typical. These tablets were originally purchased by the Hartford Seminary in 1913. The tablets were carefully numbered and maintained and a preliminary catalogue was begun by Lewis Patton but never completed. Not until 1951 did Ferris Stephens survey the collection, and only in 1955 was